GEN

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 1833 02483 8747

Gc 974.702 T16s
Stryker, William S. 1838-
1900.
The massacre near Old Tappan

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

https://archive.org/details/massacrenearoldt00stry_0

THE MASSACRE

NEAR

OLD TAPPAN

THE MASSACRE

NEAR

OLD TAPPAN.

BY

WILLIAM S. STRYKER,

ADJUTANT GENERAL OF NEW JERSEY.

READ BEFORE THE NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, AT THEIR MEETING AT TRENTON, JANUARY 23, 1879.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION.

Bergen County Historical Society

TRENTON, N. J.:
NAAR, DAY & NAAR, BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS.
1882.

Allen County Public Library
900 Webster Street
PO Box 2270
Fort Wayne, IN 46801-2270

The Massacre near Old Tappan.

The year seventeen hundred and seventy-eight of the Revolutionary period is not only memorable on account of the terrible sufferings of the Continental Army at Valley Forge and the hot fight on the field of Monmouth, but for three brutal massacres perpetrated in three of the middle colonies.

On the third day of July, a band of Tories and Indians murdered the inhabitants of the peaceful valley of Wyoming, and committed such dreadful outrages upon Pennsylvania homes as to arouse the indignation and revenge of her citizens. On the eleventh day of November, a party of a similar character, headed by the notorious Joseph Brant, having killed the officer in command of the little fort at Cherry Valley, New York, massacred indiscriminately the men, women and children of that little hamlet. The third instance we propose to narrate more in detail. It occurred on the twenty-eighth day of September, on the soil of New Jersey, but near Tappan village, New York, a place afterward so noted for the confinement and execution of Major Andre.

The British Commander, Sir Henry Clinton, having just returned from the Bedford expedition, resolved to send some of his force along the lower Jersey coast to capture, if possible, some of the American privateers, to retake some of the prizes, and to destroy the grain mills and salt works of that district.

To divert attention from this predatory expedition, as

well as to procure fresh supplies of meat and forage for the army, Lord Cornwallis, with five thousand men, was ordered to pass over the Hudson river into Bergen county, New Jersey, that rich land belonging to Dutch farmers so frequently pillaged by the British.

With Cornwallis was sent Major General Sir Charles Grey, who before this had executed the orders of Clinton in stealing or destroying provisions, military and naval stores and vessels, and levying heavy contributions on the villages of Fairhaven, Bedford and Martha's Vineyard.

The German General Knyphausen was also ordered to march with three thousand men to Dobb's Ferry, on the east bank of the Hudson River, and to collect a large number of boats there, so that within a few hours he could reinforce Cornwallis, if it was found important, or Cornwallis could be brought over the river to his support, if he found himself in danger.

General Washington had, at this time, just left White Plains with his division of the American Army, had crossed the river and had encamped at Fredericksburg, then a precinct of what is now a large portion of the county of Putnam. His quarters were at Patterson in that county, a village almost due east from West Point.

It appeared to the American Chieftain, by the movements of the two columns of the enemy, that an expedition up the Hudson River was intended, and he ordered Colonel George Baylor, with the Third Regiment Light Dragoons of Virginia, to move from their station at Paramus, a small hamlet on Saddle River, about six miles northwest from Hackensack, and post themselves on the Hackensack River to watch the movements northward of the force under Lord Cornwallis. Colonel Baylor had up to this time proved

himself a very gallant officer. In the campaign of 1776 he had been a member of Washington's own military family, being his personal aide-de-camp. At the battle of Trenton he was the first to report the surrender of the routed Hessian force, and for his valor that day he had had the honor of being the bearer of the despatches of December 27, 1776, to Congress, then in session at Baltimore, and of presenting a captured Hessian standard to that body. Congress, on receiving them, voted him a horse properly caparisoned, and recommended him to be promoted to the command of a regiment of light horse, which promotion had been conferred upon him.

It was just at twilight, September 27th, 1778, when Colonel Baylor and his troopers came to the little stream of the Hackensack, somewhat over three miles southwest from Tappan village. Here he learned that Brigadier General Anthony Wayne was but a short distance north of Tappan with a body of militia. So fearing, perhaps, the superior rank of Wayne, and not wishing to lose his detached authority, he halted his men on the Overkill Neighborhood Road, and quartered his dragoons in the barns of the thrifty farmers. His force consisted of twelve officers and one hundred and four enlisted men. Colonel Baylor, with his regimental staff officers, knocked at the farm-house of Cornelius A. Haring, and his son Ralph, who had just been married, opened the door for them. They told Mr. Haring of their desire to spend the night there, and he received them willingly, although he informed them that he understood the British were lying at New Bridge and might at any time come upon them. Colonel Baylor did not appear alarmed at this statement, but after seeing that his men were well provided for and after posting a guard of a sergeant and

twelve men at the bridge over the Hackensack, about one-half a mile south of Mr. Haring's house, with strict orders to keep a patrol of two men on each road to watch them a mile below and to be relieved every hour, he retired to sleep in fancied security. This house was torn down about sixty years ago, but the property is still in possession of Cornelius R. Haring, a grandson of the Revolutionary owner. It is now within the bounds of the post village of Rivervale, Washington township, Bergen county.

Lord Cornwallis at this time had his division posted on the Hackensack River at Liberty Pole and New Bridge, about three miles from Hackensack and nine miles from Colonel Baylor's outguards. Full particulars of Baylor's position at Paramus, of his movements to the Hackensack River, and now of his unsoldierly condition and insecure post, had been given by some of the disaffected people in the neighborhood to Cornwallis, and he formed a plan to surprise and capture the regiment, as well as make a simultaneous attack by Knyphausen's men upon General Wayne and his militia force. There were two roads which led from the camp of Cornwallis to Overkill Neighborhood, one on each side of the Hackensack River.

As soon as General Knyphausen at Dobb's Ferry had heard from Lord Cornwallis of Colonel Baylor's position, he ordered a detachment under command of Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell, commanding officer of the Seventy-first or Highland Regiment, with his own regiment and with the Queen's Rangers, Lieutenant Colonel J. Graves Simcoe commanding, to cross the river immediately and attack General Wayne's militia near Tappan. The boats were manned after some delay, and the party began the passage of the river just below the Tappan Zee.

To Major General Grey, the famous marauder, was assigned the duty of attacking the sleeping Baylor. He had acquired the name of "no flint General," from his habit of ordering his troops to take the flint from their guns so as to make them depend solely on the use of the bayonet. He was just the man, then, for this bloody work.

The troops ordered on duty were the twelve companies of the Second Battalion Light Infantry to lead the column, with the Second Regiment of Grenadiers, the Thirty-third and Sixty-fourth Regiments of the British line as a supporting force.

The troops just before midnight, September 27th, marched on the road on the west bank of the Hackensack River silently and in perfect order until they arrived within half a mile of the patrol on that road.

Here they halted, and, guided by some Tories who knew the ground, a party of picked men from six of the companies of the Second Battalion Light Infantry, under the command of Major the Hon. John Maitland, of the Seventy-first Regiment, made a detour to the left through the fields and then passed to the rear of the sergeant's guard at the bridge and the patrol on the river road, and without the slightest difficulty made them prisoners. One, at least, of the sentries, however, escaped.

This being accomplished without any noise or alarm, the force under General Grey pushed on toward Old Tappan. Major Turner Straubenzee, of the Seventeenth Regiment of Foot, but now detached in command of the other six companies of the Second Battalion Light Infantry, was in the advance, and it was this party which first arrived at Baylor's quarters, and surrounded the house and barn of Cornelius A. Haring.

It was now, as stated in British accounts, between one and two o'clock in the morning of September 28th, when they came up to the post of the sleeping American dragoons.

The sentinel who had escaped from the sergeant's guard at the bridge awoke Ralph Haring, who aroused his father. Mr. Haring, half-dressed, and with a candle, came to the front door just as it was burst in, and under the orders of General Grey to "show no quarter to the rebels," the brutal and profane soldiery rushed in to bayonet the inmates. Colonel Baylor was aroused by the noise and by the inquiries made for him, and he and Major Alexander Clough tried to conceal themselves up the large Dutch chimney in the house. Both, however, were soon discovered and brought down severely wounded, their blood running over the floor. Colonel Baylor received three severe stabs. Major Clough soon after died from the terrible bayonet thrusts. Cornet Robert Morrow, Adjutant of the troop, also received seven wounds, and, after having surrendered, begged for his life, but quarter was refused; he was stabbed again and stripped of his clothing. Dr. Thomas Evans, the Surgeon's Mate, was also wounded, but carried off a prisoner.

Leaving the house, they also burst open the door of the barn and freely used the bayonet there. Lieutenant John Stith had his company in the barn, and finding they were surrounded he called out that they surrendered, but he was then inhumanly struck on the head with a sword, which knocked him to the floor. Recovering himself, he made a desperate effort, and with some of his men escaped from the barn, jumped the fence and plunged into a dense thicket near by.

While this was being done, the supporting column of General Grey's forces, Major Maitland's party having re-

joined them, came up, and they also took part in the affair. Other houses and barns in the neighborhood, owned by the Blauvelts, the Demarests, Holdrums, Harings and Bogarts, were visited and scenes of like character enacted. The cries for mercy of the defenceless soldiers were answered only by acts of savage cruelty. Thomas Talley, of the Sixth troop, received six wounds in his breast and was stripped of his clothing. Private Benson, of the Second troop, had twelve bayonet wounds inflicted under the distinct orders given by the British officer to "stab all and take no prisoners." Private Southward, of the Fifth troop, although he himself escaped, saw five of his company bayonetted to death after they had surrendered. Private Cullency, of the First troop, received twelve wounds and saw wounded men knocked in the head with clubbed guns. The dragoons, surprised, incapable of successful defence, with no prospect of inflicting injury on their foe, could only sue for pity. But the bayonet was still at its bloody work, and thrust after thrust was given whenever any sign of life appeared.

Lieutenant William Barret succeeded in escaping. Captain John Swan, Lieutenant Robert Randolph and Cornets William Parsons, Francis Dade and Chiswell Barret were taken prisoners. Cornet Perigrine Fitzhugh was killed. Adjutant Robert Morrow, badly wounded, was left in a barn for dead, but next morning was carried away by Lieutenant John Stith and a party of the escaped men of Baylor's Regiment.

A part of Sir James Baird's company surrounded a barn in which sixteen dragoons were sleeping, who fired about a dozen pistols, killed an enlisted man of the British Second Battalion, and then struck at their foe with their broad-

swords. Nine of the dragoons were bayonetted and seven were taken prisoners.

The Fourth troop of Baylor's Regiment, although taken prisoners, were the only ones uninjured, because of the humane disobedience of orders by a British Captain.

The result of this slaughter was that out of the one hundred and sixteen men of the regiment, eleven were instantly bayonetted to death, seventeen left behind covered with bayonet wounds and expected to die, and thirty-nine were taken prisoners, eight of whom were severely wounded. The rest of the troopers escaped in the darkness. All the arms and seventy horses were part of the booty captured.

Nothing can be said in defence of the conduct of Colonel Baylor. He had been one of the party which twenty-one months previous had proven to the Hessian Rall that in war it is dangerous to undervalue your enemy; that it is unwise when in the vicinity of your foe to throw out a weak guard and leave the flanks unprotected.

Forgetting the surprise and fate of the German soldier, he acted himself in the same careless and unsoldierly manner, and came near paying the same penalty for his folly. His conduct in this affair must be fully condemned.

General Grey's force remained in that vicinity until daylight, when they marched to Tappan with their prisoners, turning the old church there into a hospital and a prison.

While all this was going on, Lieutenant Colonel Campbell was marching from Sneden's Landing, on the Hudson River, by a direct road towards Tappan villiage, having been delayed by the tedious passage of the river. But he found that Wayne's militia, having heard of his approach at the critical moment, from a deserter, had quietly retreated, and his expedition was thus rendered fruitless.

3 1833 02483 8747

A strong feeling of indignation spread over the country when this cruel massacre was announced. The army at Fredericksburg and at West Point were greatly exasperated and plans of revenge were discussed, as appears from letters written at the camp. The affair, while it seemed so very brutal, was also certainly very impolitic, as the killing of a few defenceless men in the night would hardly reward the enemy for the bitter hatred engendered in the hearts and openly expressed in the homes of the patriots.

Congress. too, felt called upon to show their abhorrence of the act, which they did by a resolution October 6, 1778, "That Governor Livingston be requested to use his utmost diligence in obtaining the best information upon oath of the treatment of Colonel Baylor and his party by the enemy."

Major General Lord Stirling directed Dr. David Griffith, of Colonel George Weedon's Third Virginia Regiment, then on duty as Surgeon and Chaplain of Brigadier General William Woodford's Brigade, Continental line, who attended Colonel Baylor and his wounded men, and who was the same officer who appeared at Washington's quarters the night before the battle of Monmouth, and it is said gave him such valuable secret information, to collect all the evidence in his power and aid Governor Livingston in the search for the truth of this barbarity. This was done, and the statement of the facts in the case was fully obtained and published to the world. The affair served to increase the bitterness felt by the Continental soldier at this brutal sacrifice of the lives of his comrades, and the massacre near Old Tappan added much to that feeling of hatred of the British foe which for at least two generations thereafter was felt by American patriots.

RETURN OF OFFICERS

OF THE

THIRD REGIMENT LIGHT DRAGOONS,

CONTINENTAL ARMY,

SEPTEMBER 18, 1778.

George Baylor, - - -	Colonel,
—— ——, - - - -	Lieutentant Colonel.
Alexander Clough, - -	Major.
Robert Morrow, - -	Adjutant,
George Evans, - - -	Surgeon.
Thomas Evans, - - -	Surgeon's Mate.
William Parsons, - - -	Paymaster.
Benjamin Hart, - - -	Quarter Master.

George Lewis, -	Captain.	John Swan, - -	Captain.
Robert Smith, - -	"	Churchill Jones, -	"
Cadwalader Jones,	"	Carter Page, - -	"

John Stith, -	Lieutenant.	Walker Baylor,	Lieutenant.
John Baylor, -	"	Hill Carter, - -	"
Robert Randolph,	"	William Barret,	"

William Parsons, -	Cornet.	Perigrine Fitzhugh,	Cornet.
Chiswell Barret, - -	"	Francis Dade, - -	"
Robert Morrow, -	"	Benjamin Hart, -	"
Prestly Thornton, -	"	Edward Conner, - -	"

Baldwin Dade, - -	Cadet.	John Kelly, - - -	Cadet.

HECKMAN
BINDERY INC.
1994
Bound-To-Please® N. MANCHESTER,
INDIANA 46962